



Walsall Housing Group

Viewpoint

“Walsall Housing Group is a group of non-profit making companies that provides good quality, affordable housing for the local communities that make up Walsall. The Network management Group is responsible for both data and voice network provision, as well as the servers on which all Group applications run and data resides. Its staff support 400 users across 15 sites and underpins the organisation’s ability to deliver affordable, good quality, community based housing services.”

Phil Pettifer
Network Manager



Locked down for greater flexibility

Walsall Housing Group (WHG) is a group of non-profit making companies that provides good quality, affordable housing for the local communities that make up Walsall. WHG was established in March 2003 as a result of a transfer from Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council following a positive vote by existing tenants.

They currently own and manage around 20,700 homes located over five local trust areas organised within a group structure, led by Walsall Housing Trust. Now, employing over 700 people they are the third largest employer in Walsall. Nearly half of these staff are based in WHG offices or on their estates delivering housing and corporate support services while the other half deliver property maintenance services directly to customers.

The Group has been a committed and enthusiastic user of Wyse thin clients since 2003 recognising the value it provides in maximising the use of technology to meet objectives, whilst enabling them to empower even the remotest of workers to serve their tenants more effectively.

Taking Action

Phil Pettifer is the Network manager for WHG, he heads up a 7 man team that is part of the 20 or so staff who look after IT within the Group. Responsible for both data and voice network provision as well as the servers on which all Group applications run and data resides. His staff now support 400 users across 15 sites. Currently, they deliver 72 different applications to WHG staff from a 30 server Citrix farm.

“A Wyse thin client is some 50% cheaper than a desktop PC, giving us an average saving of around £250 per user”

Back in 2003, when WHG was established, they were already using Citrix to deliver applications to desktop PCs throughout the organisation but were unhappy with the cost of replacing these ageing PCs as well as the hidden costs of managing and maintaining them. Against this background the decision to change to Wyse thin clients was an easy one to make.

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Initially they installed around 80 Winterm 3125's in their local site as a pilot. This proved so successful that within a year they rolled them out across the entire organisation.

"The reasons for this were easy to see", explains Phil Pettifer. "Firstly, there was the capital cost of the device. Typically, a Wyse thin client is some 50% cheaper than a desktop PC, giving us an average saving of around £250 per user. So from a capital cost point of view alone the argument was compelling. But, on top of this is the fact that the device is easy to configure. This means that we can easily lock it down to ensure that users can only gain access to the data and applications they need to do their job. We do not have to worry about viruses or illegal downloads ending up on our network due to user misuse."

WHG are now installing the latest Wyse V90 class devices that offer video and audio support. This enhanced support is proving particularly important for many staff, particularly those that have to deal with repairs. They can download and store digital photographs they have taken while on site and are a key part of providing the quality service which WHG aims to offer.

"Wyse devices in comparison to PCs are cheaper to run, generate very little heat, have a much smaller footprint and are silent in operation"

Conclusion

"We have so far made capital cost savings of around £100,000 on the replacement of PCs with thin clients, but we have also benefited in a number of other ways. Firstly, it now takes some 3 minutes to setup a new thin client device and when you compare this with the average of around 45 minutes it takes to setup a desktop PC, the time savings soon mount up."

"The flexibility of the devices has also enabled many more users to benefit from our IT investment" commented Phil Pettifer. "Previously users felt that the desktop PC was their 'own' device for their exclusive use and personalised the desktop making it difficult for other employees to use. Now the standard locked-down desktop that we provide with the Wyse thin clients means that any employee can logon at any device. They can quickly and easily gain secure and fast access to the applications and data they need to be productive, from any device at any of our 15 sites."

Achieving Objectives

The benefits of WHG's thin client investment have been far reaching. "We have so far made capital cost savings of around £100,000 on the replacement of PCs with thin clients", explained Mr Pettifer. "But we have also benefited in a number of other ways. Firstly, it now takes some 3 minutes to setup a new thin client device and when you compare this with the average of around 45 minutes it takes to setup a desktop PC, the time savings soon mount up."

The benefits from an environmental perspective are also worth noting. "Wyse devices in comparison to PCs are cheaper to run, generate very little heat, have a much smaller footprint and are silent in operation".

But it is not only IT staff who have benefited. "With a PC we would have had to fix a problem at the user's desk – impacting on their productivity. Now, with the thin client, whenever there is a problem we take a new device out with us and swap it for the old one within a few minutes. We can then bring the device back to base and fix it without impacting the user", commented Mr Pettifer. "All this can be done in under half an hour."

"One other benefit, which we did not anticipate, is that we have enjoyed a reduced theft rate. Like any organisation we have suffered a number of burglaries during which IT equipment has been deliberately targeted. After we installed the thin clients, we lost a few at the next break-in, but when the thieves realised they were useless to them, did not bother stealing them again. This has certainly helped reduce the inconvenience and lost productivity we previously suffered after a burglary."

WHG are now investigating ways in which they can use Wyse thin clients to give their customers access to computing resources. "Many of our clients are ageing and have a low income and so do not have access to PCs or laptop devices that are typically available to society at large", commented Mr Pettifer. "We are looking at piloting the provision of Wyse thin client devices in a number of our multi-storey blocks to give clients secure access to our systems and enable them to log faults, access the Internet and obtain e-mail. We have already trialled this with a number of our employees gaining access to data and applications from home via our Citrix Secure Access Gateway. We believe this will really help the more disadvantaged members of society and help promote our policy of social inclusion."